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SUBJECT: TRIP REPORT: AMBASSADOR SUPPORTS EDUCATION IN NIGER STATE

SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED

11. (SBU) SUMMARY. During a January 29 trip to Niger State, the Ambassador met with Deputy Governor Ahmed Musa Ibeto, who touted the many successes of the Niger administration and assured the Ambassador that there would be no Jos-like ethnic uprising in Niger State.

(NOTE: Governor Aliyu Muazu Babangida, as chairman of the Northern Governor's Forum, was unable to receive the Ambassador at the last minute because of the sudden death and immediate burial of the late governor of Yobe State on the same day. END NOTE). The Ambassador also spoke at a ceremony at a progressive Islamic school as part of the Africa Education Initiative's (AEI) Ambassador's Girls' Scholarship Program (AGSP). She then paid a courtesy visit to the Emir (traditional ruler) of Minna, and visited the Federal University of Technology. In her meetings, the Ambassador emphasized the importance of education for development and democracy in Nigeria and promoted the Mission's many educational programs. The Ambassador's trip to Niger State, meetings at the Government House and with the Emir, and the AEI scholarship program were reported in several of the leading print and radio media outlets. END SUMMARY.

12. (SBU) Deputy Governor Ahmed Musa Ibeto (referred to as deputy chief servant) welcomed the Ambassador and was quick to point out several of the Niger administration's accomplishments, including overhauling the education system, holding regular town hall meetings with the electorate, and creating ward development committees that distribute money from the state coffers for development of local projects. In a private meeting with the deputy governor and his key advisors, the Ambassador was asked about agriculture and how to access AGOA. She reminded them of an AGOA workshop the Mission hosted in Niger State last year for 600 people, and said the Mission was prepared to help them move forward as soon as the state's entrepreneurs took the necessary steps outlined at the workshop toward becoming export-ready.

13. (SBU) The Ambassador asked about the potential for a flare-up in ethnic tensions in Niger State similar to the recent violence in Jos. The deputy governor, with his advisors chiming in, said that such ethno-political tension would be "impossible" in Niger State as it is "a peaceful melting pot where everyone- indigene or immigrant- is given equal rights and has equal access to public services including housing, education and pensions from the day they move to the state." He stressed that the word "indigene" (primarily used as a political and religious weapon denoting innate rights to land, political influence and resources by a select ethnic group, including being used to fuel conflicts) is not a term accepted in Niger State. (NOTE: In March, 2008, there were reports of localized violence including destruction of several properties following elections in one of the local government areas outside Minna, the state capital. The deputy governor and his advisors denied such

reports, attributing them to politics. END NOTE).

¶4. (SBU) At New Horizons College (NHC), a progressive Islamic school and leader among Nigeria's schools in preparing young people for university and professional development, the Ambassador distributed awards and scholarships to primary school students as part of the AGSP, an AEI initiative. In her speech, the Ambassador stressed the importance of education for democracy and development in Nigeria. Her remarks on education and the AGSP were reported in several leading print and radio media outlets. (NOTE: NHC was established by the Islamic Education Trust (IET) under the leadership of the highly respected Muslim scholar Sheikh Ahmed Lemu and his wife (a British national) Hajiya Aisha Lemu. Founded in 1963 by Sheikh Lemu, the IET has comprehensive programs incorporating Koranic and Western-style curricula in the educational materials they design, develop, publish and distribute. Sheikh Lemu is a member of the Electoral Reform Committee and a leading advocate of HIV/AIDS messaging strategies with Muslim clerics. He has also served as a member of several Nigerian institutions, including the Nigerian Inter-Religious Council (NIREC) under the Presidency; the Presidential Advisory Council on Youth Development; and the Presidential Panel on National Security. END NOTE).

¶5. (SBU) After a brief courtesy visit with the Emir (traditional ruler) of Minna, the Ambassador toured the Federal University of Technology (FUT) in Minna and met with Vice Chancellor (VC) Professor Muhammed Salihu Audu and several senior faculty members. FUT Minna has, under the leadership of VC Audu, partnered with the Mission's Public Affairs Section in arranging speaker events with students on campus. The University has been proactive in seeking additional opportunities to improve its programs through external

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linkages, putting them on a track to becoming one of Nigeria's leading technical universities. In response to requests from the VC and senior faculty members, the Ambassador agreed to explore the possibility of placing an American Corner in FUT's downtown campus and finding a Fulbright science specialist. She also explained the various exchange programs and how the university can access them, as well as agreeing to connect the Mission's ESTH officer with the director of FUT's Center for Climate Change, the only research institution in Nigeria dedicated to climate change and environmental technology.

SANDERS